

# Liberals Face Tough Campaigns

## Conservative Group Targets 5 Senators for Defeat

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SIOUX FALLS, S.D.—The thermometer never rose above zero. The wind swept unobstructed and savage across the empty plains. And for Sen. George S. McGovern (D-S.D.), trudging through another day of campaigning, the political climate was as bleak as the weather.

Local critics assail him from all sides—for supporting gun control and abortion, for visiting Fidel Castro in Cuba, for approving the strategic arms limitation and the Panama Canal treaties, for allegedly being soft on communism and for supposedly saying one thing in Washington and another in South Dakota.

Some of this is old stuff to McGovern, who never has marched in lock step with his constituents and who nonetheless has won three terms in the Senate. This day, however, standing on a platform in a large conference room and asked by a young worker what he had to say about all the criticism, McGovern got mad.

"The charge is a little moth-eaten that I say one thing in Washington and say another in South Dakota," McGovern snapped. "I would like one example. It is an insult to the people of South Dakota.

"Another charge is that I am more liberal than most people in South Dakota. That possibly is true. But the people of South Dakota are more interested in my saying and doing what I think is right than in my trimming my sails. I am a liberal Democrat. I always have been. And I'm too old to change now."

At 57 and eight years after becoming history's most spectacular loser in a presidential election, McGovern is back on the campaign trail seeking reelection to a fourth six-year term in the Senate. If he wins, he will equal the record of the late Karl E. Mundt, a Republican who was the only South Dakotan ever elected to four Senate terms.

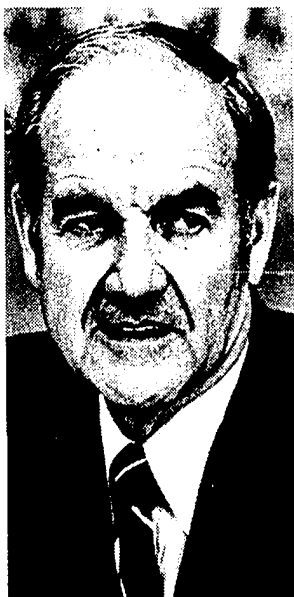
But McGovern is by no means sure of winning, even though he has no significant Republican opposition thus far. A Republican tide has been running in South Dakota since 1976, and GOP leaders are saying this is the year it will engulf McGovern.

Because of his liberalism, McGovern is one of five Democratic senators seeking reelection this year who have been singled out for defeat by the National Conservative Political Action Committee. The others are Sens. Birch Bayh of Indiana, Frank Church of Idaho, Alan Cranston of California and John C. Culver of Iowa.

Against each of the five senators, conservative group is trying to forge a coalition of voters that are angry over such diverse issues as abortion, gun control, drugs, homosexuality, the Panama Canal, school prayer, taxes, pornography, disarmament, labor unions and the equal rights amendment.

One brochure distributed in South Dakota carries a picture of McGovern with the cross hairs of a rifle sight focused on his heart. It has been widely criticized, even by conservatives.

Of the five senators on the conservative list, McGovern and Culver ap-



Sen. George S. McGovern

Times photo

pear to be the only ones who are taking the offensive in defending their liberal credentials.

Culver lashed out angrily against his critics in a fist-pounding speech last summer to a labor convention in Waterloo, Iowa.

He charged that "right-wing kooks" are operating "propaganda mills (that) keep grinding out the poison. By sheer volume and force of repetition, they can make the most outrageous allegations seem credible."

Culver's slashing attack got a standing ovation.

McGovern also got a standing ovation after the question-and-answer session that brought his angry declaration that he was too old to trim his liberal sails. His appearance that day, the first in a week of travel across his state, came three days after President Carter embargoed grain shipments to the Soviet Union in response to the invasion of Afghanistan.

Like most politicians from the grain-growing Midwest, McGovern was critical of the embargo but characteristically, he denounced it with

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Sen. John C. Culver

AP photo

the rhetoric of the populist.

"I'm skeptical about food embargoes in general," he said. "The ones you are trying to punish are the last to feel it. The healthy, the powerful, the military—they won't be hurt."

In a series of interviews, McGovern said he was fairly confident of being reelected but acknowledged that every election is a tough battle for him.

"I never win by very big margins," he said. McGovern is credited by Democrats with being the person who transformed South Dakota from a Republican bastion into something resembling a two-party state.

McGovern has said—and politicians of both parties agree—that his toughest opponent would be Gov. William J. Janklow, a colorful and controversial conservative Republican. But during the week of McGovern's visit, Janklow rejected the possibility he would run for the Senate. In a Sherman-like statement he said he would not run if nominated and would not serve if elected.

Some Republicans still hope Janklow will change his mind, but already  
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they are turning to Rep. James Abdnor, 56, a former lieutenant governor who is serving his fourth term in Congress.

"I have great respect for McGovern's political ability but either Janklow or Abdnor could give him a great deal of trouble," said Clyde Saukerson, a Republican lawyer in McGovern's hometown of Mitchell.

"McGovern's philosophy is inconsistent with that of a majority of the voters of South Dakota and it has taken them too long to realize it, but I think his record is coming back to haunt him this year," Saukerson said. "He always has been labeled by people of South Dakota as soft on communism. His trip to Cuba got a big play here, his talking to Castro. Now with the invasion of Afghanistan, we suddenly see that the Russians are the same as they always have been."

Sensitive to his reputation as a dove during the Vietnam War, McGovern has been caustic in denouncing the Afghan invasion.

"It was brutal, naked aggression," he told the Mitchell Lions Club. The audience was overwhelmingly Republican but McGovern got a warm ovation.

One of his listeners was Herman

Lerdal, a Mitchell banker. Although a Republican, Lerdal said he would be reluctant to predict that McGovern would not win.

"I have a lot of respect for McGovern's ability to campaign," Lerdal said. "He remembers names. When he comes back to the state he rekindles old friendships very rapidly. The senator could be like bankers. A lot of people hate bankers as a group but they like them as a person. With McGovern, there are people who dislike him as a politician but when he comes out to visit with them and answer their problems they like him a great deal and that's what they remember when they go to vote."

The abortion issue is one that clearly has McGovern concerned. Anti-abortion groups, who claim credit for the defeat of several members of Congress in 1978, have flooded South Dakotans with mailings denouncing McGovern's opposition to a constitutional amendment to outlaw all abortions. Both Janklow and Abdnor support the anti-abortion movement.

McGovern has prepared a lengthy position paper appealing to his constituents to judge him on his entire record, not just on abortion. It declares:

"Ask us where we stand as politicians on the issue of abortion but judge us, too, on where we stand and what we have done to feed the hungry, heal the sick, comfort the afflicted and strengthen the worker, the merchant and the senior citizen."

Abortion also is a major issue in Culver's Senate race in Iowa, South Dakota's neighbor to the southeast. In Iowa, the anti-abortion forces strongly support Culver's likely Republican opponent, Rep. Charles E. Grassley, 46, now serving his third House term.

Iowa's anti-abortion movement is tasting blood because it contends it was responsible for the upset defeat of Culver's liberal Senate colleague, Democrat Dick Clark, in 1978.

Most political strategists in the state attribute Clark's defeat to other factors, such as his campaign style and his overconfidence. But they don't discount the potency of the anti-abortion movement and the voter backlash against liberalism in general.

So Culver, who at 46 is seeking his second Senate term, is taking no chances. He is counterattacking. He has impressive attributes to carry out that tactic. He has a booming voice that can drown out a fog horn and at 240 pounds he still has the husky frame that made him a fullback at Harvard in the early 1950s.